

Book Reviews

Surgical And Medical Treatment

In Art: Alan EH Emery, Marcia LH Emery. Royal Society Of Medicine Press, October 2005. 138pp. £45.00. ISBN 1-853-15695-7



This is a fascinating compilation of sixty-six paintings chosen by the authors to demonstrate the relationship between medicine and art from 1275 BC to 2002. Paintings are taken from all over the world and deal with all branches of medicine (including some which are no longer mainline practice!).

Each painting is accompanied with a potted biography of the artist and a commentary which places the painting in its context: sociological, medical and artistic.

Whilst I was aware of some of the paintings, many are new to me. I particularly liked the portrait of Sir Alexander Morrison by Richard Dadd – the father of Psychiatry in the United Kingdom. This is a stunning portrait by an inmate and is absolutely timeless in its style.

The mediaeval representations of consultations between doctor and patient show just how much medicine has changed. Although on the previous page, the mediaeval surgery on haemorrhoids is a little distressing! In a wider sense, it is fascinating to see how our work has progressed over the years particularly since the Renaissance. It is also fascinating to see just how atmospheric so many of the paintings are – for example, that of Theodore Billroth operating by Sligenn. Here, we have a Master at work with seven scrubbed attendants and at least forty observers. Given the increasing numbers of medical students expected in our own medical school in Belfast, could this be the way of the future?

I would commend this beautiful book to all with an interest in medical and surgical art: it is a fascinating read.

NEIL McCLURE

Natural Standard Herb & Supplement Handbook – The Clinical Bottom Line

Line: Ethan M Basch, Catherine E Ulbricht. Mosby. December 2004, 1008pp. £26.99. ISBN 0-323-02993-0



Those of us who has been in clinical practice for many years will have undoubtedly encountered the patient who despite our best intentions is never cured or relieved of their symptoms by conventional medicines. Then one day they come into your consulting room and announce that they have been to an alternative practitioner, who has prescribed homeopathic medicine and this has miraculously cured them.

Due to several experiences like this, I looked into the possibility of prescribing homeopathic medicine and I consulted the available textbooks. None really attempted to look at the various homeopathic medicines on a scientific basis. One was expected to believe that they all worked because the author stated that they did.

However, at that time I wish I had had a book like this, which does attempt to try and bring a scientific basis to homeopathy and makes judgements on the basis of proper scientific trials. The qualifications of the chief editors are beyond dispute; one having received his medical degree from Harvard Medical School and the other a senior attending pharmacist at the Massachusetts General Hospital. Likewise, the qualifications of the senior editorial board and contributors to this book again are excellent. Some are qualified doctors, some are pharmacists and some have engaged in research into homeopathic medicines.

The format of the book makes it excellent as a reference to look up those medicines that your patient has been taking. The various potions are arranged in alphabetical order. Each condition is listed for which the substance could be used and given one of the grades below to show how effective the substance is in treating the condition.

- A. There is strong scientific evidence that the medicine is of benefit.
- B. There is good scientific evidence that the medicine is of benefit
- C. There is unclear or conflicting scientific evidence that the medicine is of benefit
- D. There is fair negative scientific evidence that the medicine has no benefit
- E. There is strong negative evidence that the medicine has no benefit

Fish oil is one of the substances evaluated. It is rated grade A for treatment of high blood pressure and for prevention of cardiovascular disease, a fact few cardiologists would dispute. It is given a C for treatment of depression and dysmenorrhea and D for diabetes.

Tea tree oil, which is used, for treatment of children's skin infections is given a C grade for treatment of several specific skin infections and a D grade for mouth plaque.

Melatonin is given grades A and B for several sleep disorders including jet lag. I know from my practice that it is beneficial for children with learning difficulties who have sleep problems. It is graded C for several other disorders from seizures to thrombocytopaenia.

I would recommend this book as a useful addition to the reference library for any clinician in order to keep up with what the patients (or their parents) are telling us.

CHARLES SHEPHERD